

Government of Ontario Introduces Phased Plan to Reopen the Province

Date : April 29, 2020

Recently, the Ontario Minister of Health announced that Ontario has reached the anticipated peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following this announcement, on April 27, 2020, Premier Ford released a [Framework](#) for reopening Ontario as the next phase in the Province's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The framework outlines the methods and principles that the government will use as it gradually reopens businesses, services, and public spaces.

What is the Framework?

"A Framework for Reopening our Province" sets out the government's approach to the next phase in its response to the pandemic. It outlines the principles the government will use as it makes decisions to reopen businesses, services, and public spaces in gradual stages. It also explains the criteria to be used by the Chief Medical Officer of Health to advise the government on when it is safe to begin loosening public health restrictions.

The Phases

The Framework sets out three phases for reopening Ontario. Phase 1 – the "Protect and Support" phase – is where Ontario is currently, with the government's focus being on protecting the health and well-being of individuals and families, supporting frontline health care workers, essential workers and businesses, and providing immediate support to protect people and jobs.

Phase 2 is the "Restart" phase, where the government will take a careful, stage-by-stage approach to loosening emergency measures and reopening the economy. Public health and workplace safety will remain the top priority, while balancing the needs of people and businesses. Public health officials will monitor each stage for two-to-four weeks as they assess the evolution of the COVID-19 outbreak to determine whether it is necessary to change course to protect public health.

Phase 3 is the "Recover" phase, where the government will partner with businesses and other sectors to lead Ontario's economic recovery as Ontario transitions to a "new normal." The focus during this phase will be on creating jobs and opportunity across the province, while working to restore long-term prosperity.

No timelines were proposed; however, Phase 3 is expected to last until a vaccine or treatment is developed for COVID-19.

Phase 2: The Restart Phase

Phase 2 will be gradual and is broken down into three stages. Each stage will be based on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and is expected to last approximately two-to-four weeks to allow for close monitoring of the potential resurgence of cases or other impacts.

After each two-to-four-week period, the Chief Medical Officer of Health may advise to:

- reapply or tighten certain public health measures in response to a surge in cases or outbreaks;
- maintain the status quo and continue close monitoring of impacts; or
- progress to the next two-to-four-week stage.

Throughout all of Phase 2, individuals will be expected to continue to practice physical distancing, hand washing, respiratory hygiene, and such other measures that will help protect vulnerable populations and limit health risks. This includes continuing remote work arrangements where feasible.

Criteria for Easing Public Health Measures

The Framework identifies four main criteria that Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health will consider when advising when to begin easing public health measures. These are:

- virus spread and containment, to ensure that loosening of measures is appropriately timed with the progression of the epidemic in Ontario;
- health system capacity, to ensure there is an effective response to any potential case resurgence;
- public health system capacity, to ensure there is an effective public health response to any potential resurgence; and
- incidence tracking capability, to ensure that any potential resurgence can be identified promptly.

As the province eases public health measures, the same criteria will be applied with respect to the ongoing monitoring of progress and identifying when a change in direction is required.

Workplace Safety

As part of phase 2, the government will be introducing directives and guidelines that employers and workers will be required to follow in order to protect the health and safety of their workplace, as well as resources to enable businesses to adapt. Workplaces will be required to have a plan that promotes and adheres to strict hygiene and sanitation standards, and physical distancing to the extent possible.

The government has also added more workplace inspectors and specialists to ensure workers are protected on the job, and has doubled the capacity of the Health and Safety Call Centre.

In Our View

Since the government has not identified any timelines for the transition to Phase 2 and given the number of variables at play, it is to be expected that this plan may change in the coming weeks. Emond Harnden LLP will continue to monitor relevant information as it becomes available, including with respect to the government's plan to reopen businesses.

For further information or advice on your rights and obligations as an employer when dealing with COVID-19 and similar issues, please contact [Sébastien Huard](#) at [613-940-2744](#), [J.D. Sharp](#) at [613-940-2739](#), [Colleen Dunlop](#) at [613-940-2734](#), [Jennifer Birrell](#) at [613-940-2740](#).